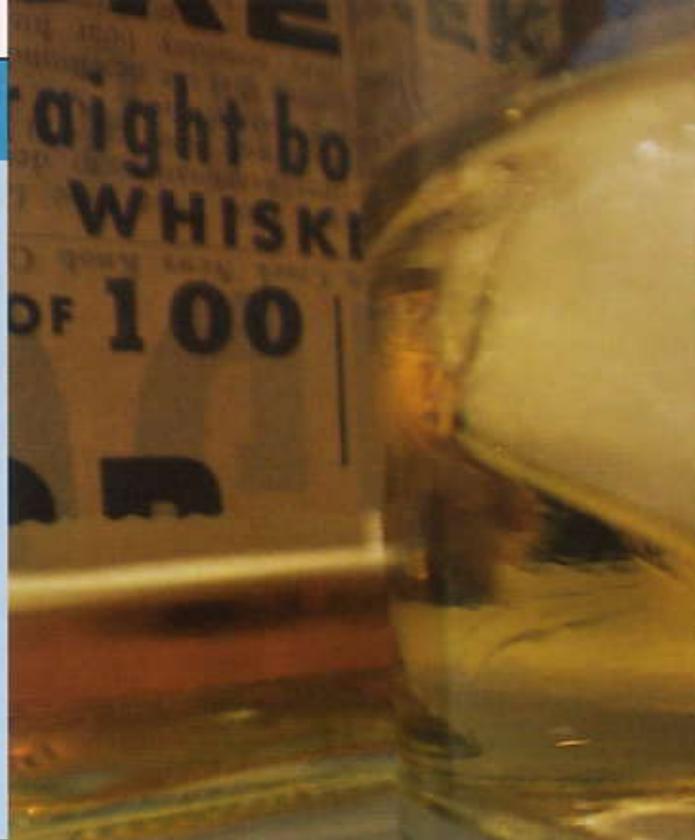


## What is Alcohol?

The term alcohol refers to ethyl or grain alcohol. Ethanol is the active ingredient found in all alcoholic beverages. These beverages include wine, beer, liqueurs, and hard liquors such as scotch, gin, vodka, tequila, and whiskey. Each of these beverages may contain different concentrations of alcohol but the effect is the same.

Each of the following contains the same amount of alcohol and is considered to be equal to one drink:

- 12 oz. can of beer at 5% alcohol
- 5 oz. glass of wine at 12% alcohol
- 1.5 oz. of 80-proof liquor at 40% alcohol
- 12 oz. wine cooler at 5% alcohol



# Alcohol Abuse

## What Are The Effects Of Alcohol?

Alcohol is a depressant, not a stimulant as many people think. The effect of alcohol on the central nervous system is similar to other depressants. Any amount of alcohol affects your judgment and coordination.

### THE DEGREE OF IMPAIRMENT DEPENDS UPON:

The amount of alcohol you consume

Your body weight

Whether or not you eat before or while drinking

The length of time you spend drinking

Your gender and age

### Short-term effects of alcohol use:

- Distorted vision, hearing, and coordination
- Altered perceptions and emotions
- Impaired judgment
- Bad breath; hangovers

### Long-term effects of heavy alcohol use:

- Loss of appetite
- Vitamin deficiencies
- Stomach ailments
- Skin problems
- Sexual impotence
- Liver damage
- Heart damage
- Central nervous system damage
- Memory loss

## What Is Alcoholism?

Alcoholism, also known as alcohol dependence, is a disease characterized by the following four symptoms.

**Craving** – A strong need, or urge, to drink. The craving that an alcoholic feels for alcohol can be as strong as the need for food or water.

**Loss of Control** – Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has begun. An alcoholic will continue to drink despite serious family, health, or legal problems.

**Physical Dependence** – Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking.

**Tolerance** – The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to get “high.”

Like many other diseases, alcoholism is chronic, meaning that it lasts a person’s lifetime. Research shows that the risk for developing alcoholism can be inherited. However, risk is not destiny. Just because you are a child of an alcoholic doesn’t mean that you will automatically become an alcoholic. Some people develop alcoholism even though no one in their family has a drinking problem.

## Am I An Alcoholic?

If you answer yes to several of these questions, you may need to seek professional help.

- Do you drink frequently?
- Do you drink at specific times of the day?
- Do you drink more than is socially acceptable?
- Do others criticize your drinking?
- Do you drink to relieve discomfort or stress?
- Do you prefer the company of drinkers to non-drinkers?
- Do you constantly drink, think about drinking or think about how to stop drinking?
- Do you drink to get high from alcohol?
- Do you become upset or leave if alcoholic beverages are not served?

Alcoholism is only one type of an alcohol problem. Alcohol abuse can be just as devastating as alcoholism. A person may drink too much and too often and still not be dependent on alcohol. Some of the problems linked to alcohol abuse include not being able to meet work, school, or family responsibilities; drunk-driving arrests and car crashes; and drinking-related medical conditions. Sometimes even social or moderate drinking is dangerous – for example, when driving, when pregnant, or when taking certain medications.

## What Is Blood Alcohol Content (BAC)?

BAC is the proportion of alcohol to blood in the body. In the field of traffic safety, BAC is expressed as a percentage. For example, 0.10 percent is equivalent to 0.10 grams of alcohol per deciliter of blood.

In the United States, the BAC limit for legally driving a car in many States is 0.10 percent. The United States is the only industrialized nation to have a BAC limit this high. Other States have lowered the legal

limit to 0.08 percent. At the 0.08 percent BAC level individuals are significantly impaired and at risk for causing harm to themselves and others. In fact, impairment of tasks necessary for safe driving begins at levels as low as 0.05 percent.

Alcohol affects individuals differently. Your blood alcohol level may be affected by your age, gender, physical condition, amount of food consumed and any drugs or medication taken. It takes the liver approximately one hour to process one alcoholic beverage out of the body. For example, a 160-pound man will still have a BAC of approximately 0.04 percent one hour after consuming two 12-ounce beers or two other standard drinks on an empty stomach. A 120-pound woman will have a BAC of approximately 0.08 percent after consuming 2 drinks in one hour – a BAC considered to be legally intoxicated in many states.

The risk of being in a motor vehicle crash increases as BAC increases. Also, the harder the driving task, the greater the impairment caused by low doses of alcohol. Compared with drivers who have not consumed alcohol, the risk of a single-vehicle

## Drinking And Driving

Drinking and driving still claims about 15,000 lives annually. Driving involves many motor skills and thought processes. To drive safely, one must maintain alertness, make decisions based on ever-changing information present in the environment, and execute maneuvers based on these decisions. Drinking alcohol impairs a wide range of motor skills necessary for carrying out these tasks.



fatal crash for drivers with BAC's between 0.02 and 0.04 percent is estimated to be 1.4 times higher; for those with BAC's between 0.05 and 0.09 percent, 11.1 times higher; for drivers with BAC's between 0.10 and 0.14 percent, 48 times higher; and for those with BAC's at or above 0.15 percent, the risk is estimated to be 380 times higher.

### FACT

**The only safe driving limit is 0 drinks.  
Impairment begins with your first drink!  
For safety's sake, never drive after drinking!**



## Underage Drinking

Although many adults laugh over their first experiment with alcohol, underage drinking is no laughing matter. Alcohol is the most commonly abused drug among youth.

The following research results indicate just how serious alcohol abuse is among our youth.

- Alcohol is the number one drug of choice among children and adolescents. A higher percentage of youth 12-20 use alcohol (29%) than use tobacco (23.3%), or illicit drugs (14.9%) (SAMHSA, 2003).
- In 2002, about 2 million youth ages 12 through 20 drank 5 or more drinks on an occasion, 5 or more times a month (and more than 7 million reported this level of consumption at least once in the survey month) (SAMHSA, 2003).
- In 2002, 1.5 million youth ages 12 through 17 met criteria for admission to alcohol treatment (of these, only 120,000 received treatment) (SAMHSA, 2003).
- 40% of those who start drinking before the age of 15 meet criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lives.

- Alcohol is a leading contributor to injury death, the leading cause of death for persons under age 21.
- Each year about 1900 persons under 21 die in motor vehicle crashes that involve underage drinking. (About another 500 persons over age 21 also die in these crashes) (NHTSA, 2003).
- Alcohol is also involved in about 1600 homicides and 300 suicides among person under age 21 (CDC, 2004).
- About 1600 persons under age 21 die from alcohol-related unintentional injuries (not related to motor vehicle crashes).
- Almost half of the approximately 2200 person who die annually in traffic crashes involving drinking drivers under age 21 are persons other than the drinking driver.
- Among college students under age 21 alone, 50,000 experience alcohol-related date rape, and 430,000 are assaulted by another student who has been drinking (NIAAA, 2002).

## What is Fetal Alcohol Syndrome?

One of the most severe effects of drinking during pregnancy is fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS). If a woman drinks alcohol during her pregnancy, her baby can be born with FAS, a lifelong, physically and mentally disabling condition. FAS is characterized by (1) abnormal facial features, (2) growth deficiencies, and (3) central nervous system (CNS) problems. Children with FAS may have problems with learning, memory, attention span, communication, vision, and/or hearing. These problems often lead to difficulties in school and problems getting along with others. FAS is a permanent condition. It affects every aspect of an individual's life and the lives of his or her family. However, FAS is 100% preventable—if a woman does not drink alcohol while she is pregnant.

